

VISN 16: Looking Forward



Robert Lynch, M.D.
Network Director

Since Hurricane Katrina damaged Biloxi/Gulfport and New Orleans almost every employee from these facilities who I have met asks me about what will happen to their hospitals in the future. For many of you wondering about your own future this is an understandably important question. The easy answer is we don't have a plan finalized yet. Obviously the scope of the damage is so great that the final decision will not be made solely within the VISN. The final plan will be the product of the collaboration of VA, Office of Management and Budget, and Congress. As soon as plans are finalized I intend to share them with you. In the meantime we do have some near term plans and some long term goals I can share with you now.

I think most of you remember that the Department's CARES plan recommended moving the functions at Gulfport to the Biloxi campus. While the CARES plan has not yet been completed, Katrina so severely damaged the Gulfport campus that we are exploring whether this option should be accelerated. This would require major construction and funding.

In the meantime there is a critical need for interim space to replace some of the lost Gulfport functions. We are pursuing projects at Biloxi to modify clinical space for mental health patients, to repair hurricane damage and "hurricane harden" the facility against future storms. Temporary buildings are being acquired to house most of the activities displaced by the loss of the Gulfport campus and the movement of Gulfport patients into existing wards at Biloxi. We hope to complete most of these activities in the coming months. Major construction to satisfy the CARES plan will take years however.

A final decision for New Orleans will also be developed outside the VISN. Regardless, I do believe it is safe to say the VA will return to the Crescent City. As with Biloxi, a definitive solution will take Congressional approval and years to complete. Again, we do have near term plans that I can share with you. Our plans are complicated by the recovery issues surrounding the City of New Orleans itself and the ultimate return of its citizens and our patients.

Establishing an inpatient presence in New Orleans will take some time. To begin to restore services to area veterans and to enable our employees to begin returning to the area, we are taking a number of steps. We are developing plans to open new clinics in La Place, Hammond and Slidell. We also hope to be

able to open an outpatient clinic in New Orleans itself. We are exploring the possibility of doing this at the medical center. To support these clinics and the evacuee population in the area, we will be reopening the old clinic building in Baton Rouge. This will allow for not only expanded clinic space but will allow us to open laboratory, radiological and IT support for the New Orleans area clinics. Lastly, we hope to find space to move some administrative services into the New Orleans area. We also hope to complete these initiatives in the coming months.

A final decision on how to restore inpatient and certain specialty services in New Orleans has not been made. Ultimately, the decision will come down to whether it is better to repair or replace the existing facility. This is currently being studied and discussed. For the short term, steps are being taken to restore vital services and functions at the facility. Over the coming weeks and months we expect to restore power, water, limited climate control systems, elevators, and safety systems. Some of these repairs will be temporary in nature and will not allow us to fully utilize the whole building. They will allow us to better assess the damage to the facility and its equipment from the high humidity and heat that have existed since Katrina. In the meantime, the flooded areas have been pumped out. The flooded areas will be cleaned and damaged equipment will be removed.

To fully restore all functions in New Orleans will require permanent replacement of systems lost when the basement flooded. It will also require repair or replacement of building structures and equipment damaged by the humidity and heat. Regardless of how we proceed these are long term projects and won't be completed quickly.

For displaced New Orleans employees I am certain you are wondering what all this means to you. Obviously some of you will be moving to staff the clinical and administrative functions we are placing in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. For some this may mean you can return to your homes to live. For others it still leaves a final answer dependant on when we fully reopen services in New Orleans. We are developing options for all of you that will try to balance the needs of VA and your personal needs to get your lives back to normal. I will discuss those plans in a future newsletter.

Robert Lynch, M.D.

Notice for employees using rental cars

In mid-October VISN 16 will be reevaluating the approval of rental cars. By then it is the expectation that employees who have rental cars will have made alternative transportation arrangements.

For example, hopefully employees have recovered their car from New Orleans, filed claims with their insurance company, and replaced or repaired, or made other arrangements such as carpooling or mass transit (bus). If you have not made alternative arrangements, please begin to do so before October 12, 2005.

New Orleans administrative offices relocate

The New Orleans VA administrative staff is in the process of moving out of their temporary work space at the network office in Jackson, Miss. to a new location in the Jackson area. To reach the New Orleans administrative staff or for questions concerning the New Orleans VA, the new number to call is 601-420-1984.

New Orleans Credit Union relocates

The New Orleans credit union relocated on October 3, 2005 to the following address—

Lockheed Credit Union
430 Commerce Park Drive
Marietta, GA 30061

Members may call the Credit Union at 1-800-521-8921 ext. 697 or 770-421-2697.

New Orleans VA employees who have made no contact with VA

The percentage of New Orleans VA employees who have contacted the VA after Hurricane Katrina is now at 97 percent. The following is a list of employees who have not yet made contact. If you know the whereabouts of any of these New Orleans VA employees, please have them call 1-888-766-2474.

Bowles, Jennifer L	Martin, Jerome H	Sievertsen, Erik E
Butler, Lucretia M	McEwen, Terri Ann	Simpson, Estrelita H
Coleman, Theone Y	Mitchell, Marcia S	Slater, Julia
Dixon, Hubert	Murphy, Ronald T	Smith, Charlene M
Drewes, Wayne T	Nakamura, Shawn J	Spencer, Sharon L
Epps, Joseph M	Owens, Larry D	Sylvester, Barry S
Everett, Kenneth L	Payne, Myrtle L	Taylor, Vickie A
Ge, Lin-Jun	Porter, Carlette M	Tran, Thien Lan T
Hill, Marion S	Prince, Gwendolyn C	Tuft, Helen A
Hunter, George	Ricciardi, James E	Walker, Philpatrick D
Jacques, Patricia A	Rivera, Guillermo F	Wang, Yi-Zarn
Johnson, Dennis E	Robertson, Kathleen A	Washington, Harold B Sr
Joseph, Joyce L	Sabatier, Sonia M	Washington, Lionel
Larkin, Michael W	Sakauye, Kenneth M	Weyer, Susan M
Mack, Linda M	Sam, Charles J Jr	Young-Cannon, Danielle A
Mansion, Avanelle D	Sanders, Debra	

VA staff in Jackson praised

The following letter is to Robert Lynch, M.D., Network Director, South Central VA Health Care Network—VISN 16 concerning the staff at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Miss.

Dr. Lynch,

I wanted to let you know of the outstanding support the folks at the Jackson VA provided in support of the Hammond mobile clinic. I was the supply driver for the past two weeks and was very impressed with support we received. In my normal job, I am a staff assistant in the Director's office, so I understand how difficult a task the logistical operation is for this mission. Whatever the site needed, the Jackson staff provided. More often than not, it was at the loading dock waiting for me. The Jackson staff I worked with were most often was Dave Walker, Jim Kato, Rick Moreira, and the laundry staff. I believe the success of the Hammond operation is due in no small part to their efforts.

Toby Lane

Tomah VAMC

All New Orleans VA Medical Center should complete the Employee Personal Needs Checklist found on the VISN Web site, www.visn16.med.va.gov.

Past issues of *After the Storm* can be found on the intranet at vaww.visn16.med.va.gov or on the internet at www.visn16.med.va.gov.

About *After the Storm*

The *After the Storm* newsletter is a publication produced by the South Central VA Health Care Network in an effort to supply updated information to those affected by Hurricane Katrina as we continue to recover from this devastating storm.

This newsletter will be published on a recurring basis. For more information about the publication or to provide story ideas or information, call April Smith, writer/editor, VISN 16, at 601-364-7902.

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